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Human resources management

Joint Inspection Unit

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on strengthening the investigations function in United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for the consideration of the General Assembly his comments as well as those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Strengthening the investigations function in United Nations system organizations" (JIU/REP/2000/9).

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Comments of the Secretary-General and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Strengthening the investigations function in United Nations system organizations" (JIU/REP/2000/9)

I. Introduction

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit concerns investigations as an important component of internal oversight in the organizations of the United Nations. The report offers a number of conclusions and recommendations for the strengthening of the investigations function in the organizations of the United Nations system, which in general have been welcomed by the organizations that have provided comments on the report. The following organizations provided inputs that are reflected in the present comments: Office of Internal Oversight Services, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Civil Aviation Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Children's Fund and Universal Postal Union.

II. General comments

2. From a system-wide perspective, there is general support for the recommendations contained in the report, which are considered to constitute a coherent checklist of steps required for enhancing the capacity of United Nations agencies to implement an effective investigations function.

3. The report also seems to be useful in that it provides the first comprehensive picture of an important area that for many organizations is one in which policies and arrangements have been developed relatively recently.

4. A number of agencies commented on the timeliness of the report. Although agencies may be at different stages in the development of the investigations function, the recommendations contained in the report have enabled them to review and, in some instances: (a) to validate the appropriateness of their current arrangements; and (b) to formulate revised policies and strategies.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1: Common standards and procedures

The Third Conference of Investigators of United Nations Organizations and Multilateral Financial Institutions in 2001 should make arrangements for developing and adopting a common set of standards and procedures for conducting investigations in United Nations system organizations.

5. Some organizations support the related recommendation in paragraph 77 that there would be an advantage in taking training initiatives at the inter-agency level in order inter alia to strengthen the coherent application of the standards and procedures referred to in recommendation 1.

6. It should be noted, however, that because of the absence of common legal bases for the requisite legal framework for investigation, the adoption of common standards and procedures may be problematic. Therefore, until the legal bases are common, the operative procedures must reflect the existing legal bases.

Recommendation 2: Training for managers

Executive heads of organizations should ensure that managers involved in investigations have sufficient training in the use of established standards and procedures for conducting investigations.

7. A common inter-agency concern in respect of recommendation 2 is that of identifying the responsibility of line managers in the investigations process and, in consequence, of providing written guidance to managers that would make clear at which point in an investigation and under what circumstances the support of professional investigators might be sought.

Recommendation 3: Meeting the need for a professional investigations capacity

Each executive head should conduct a risk profile of his/her organization as an initial

basis for issuing a report to the appropriate legislative organ on the organization's need for access to professionally trained and experienced investigators. This report should indicate those measures that the executive head would recommend as necessary to meet this need.

8. Recommendation 3 seems to be generally accepted.

Recommendation 4: Options for financing access of small organizations to a professional investigations capability

Executive heads of small organizations should present to their appropriate legislative organs options for financing the access that may be necessary for their organizations to professionally trained and experienced investigators such as, inter alia, the use of common services and/or outsourcing (including within the United Nations system).

9. The Office of Internal Oversight Services is currently formulating a mechanism, approved by the United Nations Controller, to reimburse the cost of providing investigation services to the funds and programmes and setting out the terms of such arrangements.

Recommendation 5: Preventive measures based on proactive investigations and lessons learned

Executive heads should ensure that work programmes of units responsible for investigations include the development of preventive measures based on proactive investigations and lessons learned from completed investigations.

10. Recommendation 5 is generally accepted with the recognition/understanding that smaller organizations with fewer cases may be in a position to do more proactive work than larger organizations with larger workloads and that cumulative cases in progress require constant attention, leaving little time for proactive work. It is also generally believed that emphasis should also be given to the identification of episodic as opposed to systemic issues that come under investigation and to the sharing of lessons learned, inter alia in the context of recommendation 6 below.

Recommendation 6: Conferences of United Nations Investigators

Conferences of Investigators of United Nations Organizations and Multilateral Financial Institutions should continue to develop opportunities, including those external to the system, to foster inter-agency cooperation regarding the investigations function in areas such as those indicated in the report.

11. In addition to the areas referred to in paragraph 77 in the context of recommendation 6, agencies also anticipate that there could be greater commonality in areas related to investigations, such as in agencies' procedures for the administration of justice (including disciplinary procedures and more common approaches to the determination of "due process").